Ultimate Guide to the TOEFL® iBT (2026 Edition)

THE WRITING SYSTEM

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SYSTEM BOOKS

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THE DEATH OF THE TOEFL® ESSAY: WELCOME TO SENTENCE ENGINEERING

Why Your Memorized Templates Will Fail You in the Redesigned 2026 Writing Section?

For years, TOEFL® preparation was simple: memorize a 5-paragraph essay template, insert a few keywords, write 350 words about an abstract topic, and secure your score. **On January 21, 2026, ETS completely retired the independent essay.**

The redesigned TOEFL iBT Writing section is fast, transactional, and hyper-focused on **syntactic precision and pragmatic competence**. You have just 23 minutes to complete three completely different tasks:

1. **Build a Sentence:** You must drag and drop scrambled words into a grammatically perfect sentence. There is nowhere to hide—your syntax must be flawless.
2. **Write an Email:** You have exactly 7 minutes to compose a clear, polite, and functionally accurate email. Tone and register are strictly evaluated.
3. **Write for an Academic Discussion:** You have 10 minutes to read a discussion board thread and write a 100+ word post that organically contributes to the debate.

If you struggle with basic word order, if your emails sound rude or awkward because you are translating literally from your native language, or if you cannot formulate a strong academic argument in under 10 minutes, old templates will not help you. You need to learn how to **engineer** sentences.

Welcome to "The Writing System"

This is not a book of generic writing prompts or long, passive grammar lessons. Developed by Dr. Hikmet Sahiner—drawing from 25+ years of elite exam preparation, a Johns Hopkins Ph.D., and Cambridge CELTA credentials—this book is an **active writing workshop**.

In this free preview, you will master the foundational mechanics of the new exam:

1. **Sentence Architecture (Chapter 2):** Unlock the logical steps to deciphering and passing the *Build a Sentence* task with speed and precision.

2. **Email Functional Blueprint (Chapter 11):** Master the precise structures of greetings, body paragraphs, and sign-offs to write high-scoring emails in under 7 minutes.

Stop writing memorized essays. Start engineering high-scoring TOEFL responses.

Turn the page, take the challenge, and rewrite your TOEFL destiny.

Chapter 2 – The “Build a Sentence” Task: Strategy and Timing

2.1 What the “Build a Sentence” Task Looks Like

In the first part of the new TOEFL Writing section, you will see Build a Sentence items. These look simple, but they test a lot of important grammar and word order skills.

2.1.1 On-Screen Format

On the screen you see:

- A short instruction, like:

“Move the words in the boxes to create a grammatical sentence.”

- Several boxes, each with one word or short phrase inside.

- An area where you drag or click the boxes to put them in order.

- A clock showing how much time you have left for this part.

Each item is independent. For every item, you must:

1. Use all the words/phrases.

2. Use each word/phrase exactly once.

3. Make one complete, grammatical sentence.

You do not type the sentence. You just move the boxes.

2.1.2 Sample Item 1

On screen:

Move the words in the boxes to create a grammatical sentence.

[last night] [my friends] [at the new café] [met]

Your job is to put them in a natural English order.

Correct sentence:

My friends met at the new café last night.

Notice:

- **Subject** = my friends

- **Verb** = met

- **Place** = at the new café

- **Time** = last night

We normally use Subject + Verb + (Place) + (Time).

2.1.3 Sample Item 2

On screen:

Move the words in the boxes to create a grammatical sentence.

[you know] [when] [starts] [the concert] [?]

Correct sentence:

Do you know when the concert starts?

Here the structure is a little more complex:

- **Outer question:** Do you know…?

- **Inner clause:** when the concert starts (normal statement order → "the concert starts", not "does the concert start").

You will see many items like this: questions and indirect questions.

2.1.4 How Many Items?

At the time of writing, ETS has shown samples with around 10 Build a Sentence items in the Writing section. ETS may change small details, so always check the official website. However:

- You should be ready to answer about 10 items.

- Each item probably has equal value in scoring (e.g., 1 point per item).

Because each item is short, you must work quickly and accurately. Later in this chapter, we will talk about timing.

2.2 Scoring and Common Error Types

You need to know what TOEFL wants and what can make you lose points.

2.2.1 How These Items Are Scored

Although ETS does not publish a detailed public scoring formula for this specific task, from similar tests we can reasonably assume:

- Each item is scored right or wrong.

- If your word order makes a grammatical, natural sentence, you get the point.

- If the sentence is ungrammatical or unnatural, you get 0.

- There is no partial credit (for example, you do not get "half a point" if most of it is right).

- Small differences in capitalization or a missing final period are probably not as serious, but it is better to do them correctly.

Because there is no partial credit, you must aim for:

- High accuracy

- Fast decision-making

2.2.2 Common Error Type 1: Wrong Basic Word Order

English is fairly strict about word order:

- **In a statement:**

Subject → Verb → Object/Complement → Extra information (time, place, manner)

Example error:

Yesterday went Tom to the library.

Correct pattern:

Tom went to the library yesterday.

Many learners:

- Put time or place before the verb in a strange way.

- Forget the subject or put it in the wrong place.

2.2.3 Common Error Type 2: Missing or Wrong Verb Form

Sometimes students choose the wrong verb form or forget a main verb.

Example boxes:
[my brother] [late] [yesterday]

Common wrong answer:
My brother late yesterday.

Correct:

My brother was late yesterday.

Every clause (a group of words that can be a sentence) needs:

- a **subject** (who/what the sentence is about)

- a **verb** (what the subject does or is)

You will also see:

- Confusion between *is/was* and *has been*

- Confusion between *do/does/did* and the main verb

2.2.4 Common Error Type 3: Wrong Question Word Order

Direct questions in English change the word order:

- **Yes/no question:**
Do/Does/Did/Is/Are/Was/Were + Subject + Main Verb…?

- **WH-question:**
WH-word (what/where/when/why/how) + Do/Does/Did/Is/Are/Was/Were + Subject + Main Verb…?

Example error:
Where you are going?

Correct:

Where are you going?

In indirect questions, the order is different:

- “Do you know where he lives?” (NOT “where does he live”)

Many Build a Sentence items test this difference.

2.2.5 Common Error Type 4: Relative Clause in the Wrong Place

A relative clause adds extra information about a noun and begins with words like:

- *who, which, that, where, when*

It must come immediately after the noun it describes.

Example:

The teacher who helped me with my essay is very kind.

Common wrong pattern:

The teacher is very kind who helped me with my essay.

You will see boxes like:

[who helped me with my essay] - [the teacher] - [very kind] - [is]

You must learn to put the relative clause in the correct place. We will work on this a lot in Chapters 3 and 5.

2.2.6 Common Error Type 5: Prepositional Phrases in Strange Positions

A prepositional phrase starts with a preposition like *in, on, at, for, with, about, because of* and adds extra information: - *in the library, at 3 p.m., because of the rain*

These phrases are flexible, but some orders are more natural.

Example:

I met my friend at the library.

Less natural:

I at the library met my friend.

This type of item tests your feeling for natural English word order.

2.2.7 Why These Errors Matter

Build a Sentence items are not only about this small part of the test. They show:

- How well you control grammar at sentence level.

- Whether your later email and discussion writing will be full of errors or not.

If you fix these patterns here, your writing in Parts II and III will be much stronger.

2.3 Strategy: From Boxes to Sentence in 4 Steps

Now we will learn a clear, repeatable strategy. With practice, you should be able to apply it in under 30–40 seconds per item.

Step 1: Find the Subject and Main Verb (The "Spine")

- First, quickly scan the boxes and ask:
  - Who or what is this sentence mainly about? → **Subject**
  - What is that person/thing doing or being? → **Main verb**

- The subject will often be:
  - a noun phrase (my friend, the university, our teachers), or
  - a pronoun (I, you, he, she, we, they, it).

- The main verb might be:
  - a form of *be* (am, is, are, was, were, been), or
  - a simple verb (go, went, study, studied, will study), or
  - a modal structure (can help, should read, must finish).

Step 2: Add Objects and Complements

- Next, look for words or phrases that complete the meaning after the verb:
  - **Objects** answer "who?" or "what?" after the verb.
    e.g. *read the book, invite my friend*
  - **Complements** give more information about the subject or object.
    e.g. *is tired, became a doctor*

Step 3: Place Time, Place, and Other Extra Information

- Now place the remaining boxes:
  - **Time** (yesterday, last week, in the morning, next year…)
  - **Place** (at the library, in my hometown, on campus…)
  - **Manner** (quickly, carefully, loudly…)
  - **Reason** (because of the rain, due to traffic…)

- **General rule** (not 100%, but very useful):

Subject + Verb + Object/Complement + Place + Time

Step 4: Check Tense, Agreement, and Punctuation

- Finally, quickly check:

1. **Tense**

- Does the verb match any time words?
- *yesterday* → past simple (went, was)
- *right now* → present continuous (is studying)
- *already* + past action → sometimes present perfect (has finished)

2. Subject–Verb Agreement

- Singular subject → singular verb (The student is…)
- Plural subject → plural verb (The students are…)

3. Question vs. Statement

- If there is a question mark **[?]** box, you probably need question order.
- Do/Does/Did/Is/Are before the subject in a direct question.

4. Capital letter and final punctuation

- Capitalize the first word.
- Use a period for statements and a question mark for questions.

Step 1: Find the Subject and Main Verb (The "Spine")

Example boxes:
[the new library] [open] [next month] [will]

Step 1:

- **Subject** → the new library

- **Main verb phrase** → will open

So we know our "spine" is: ***The new library will open …***

Step 2: Add Objects and Complements

Next, look for words or phrases that complete the meaning after the verb:

- **Objects** answer "who?" or "what?" after the verb. - e.g. *read the book, invite my friend*

- **Complements** give more information about the subject or object. - e.g. *is tired, became a doctor*

In our example:
[the new library] [open] [next month] [will]

There is no object; *open* is complete with just the subject. So we move on.

Another example:
[bought] [my parents] [me] [a new laptop]

Step 1:

- Subject = my parents

- Verb = bought

Step 2:

- Objects = me, a new laptop

We arrange them:

My parents bought me a new laptop.

(English typically uses Subject + Verb + Indirect object (person) + Direct object (thing).)

Step 3: Place Time, Place, and Other Extra Information

Now place the remaining boxes:

- **Time** (yesterday, last week, in the morning, next year…)

- **Place** (at the library, in my hometown, on campus…)

- **Manner** (quickly, carefully, loudly…)

- **Reason** (because of the rain, due to traffic…)

General rule (not 100%, but very useful):

- Subject + Verb + Object/Complement + Place + Time

Example:

The new library will open in the city center next month.

You can sometimes move time/place to the beginning:

- *Next month, the new library will open in the city center.*

But in Build a Sentence tasks, the simplest pattern is usually best.

Step 4: Check Tense, Agreement, and Punctuation

Finally, quickly check:

1. **Tense**

- Does the verb match any time words? - *yesterday* → past simple (went, was)

- *right now* → present continuous (is studying)

- *already* + past action → sometimes present perfect (has finished)

2. **Subject–Verb Agreement**

- Singular subject → singular verb (The student is…)

- Plural subject → plural verb (The students are…)

3. **Question vs. Statement**

- If there is a question mark **[?]** box, you probably need question order.

- Do/Does/Did/Is/Are before the subject in a direct question.

4. **Capital letter and final punctuation**

- Capitalize the first word.

- Use a period for statements and a question mark for questions.

2.3.1 Strategy in Action – Example 1

Boxes:

[because of the heavy snow] [yesterday] [were] [canceled] [all classes]

Step 1 – Subject and main verb

- Subject: all classes

- Verb phrase: were canceled

Start: *All classes were canceled …*

Step 2 – Objects/Complements

- No object; “were canceled” is complete.

Step 3 – Time and reason

- Time: yesterday

- Reason: because of the heavy snow

We usually place reason phrases after the rest of the sentence:

- *All classes were canceled yesterday because of the heavy snow.*

Step 4 – Check

- Tense: past (yesterday) → “were canceled” = good.

- Agreement: classes (plural) + were (plural) = good.

- Punctuation: Add period.

Final:

All classes were canceled yesterday because of the heavy snow.

2.3.2 Strategy in Action – Example 2 (Indirect Question)

Boxes:
[when] [know] [the guest speaker] [will arrive] [do you] [?]

Step 1 – Subject and main verb

Outer question: - Subject: you - Verb: do know → “Do you know…?”

Inner clause: - Subject: the guest speaker - Verb phrase: will arrive

Step 2 – Objects/Complements

The thing you “know” is a clause: *when the guest speaker will arrive.*

Step 3 – Put it together - Start with question form: Do you know…? - Then add inner clause with normal word order (subject before verb):

Do you know when the guest speaker will arrive?

(Do NOT write “when will the guest speaker arrive” in an indirect question.)

Step 4 – Check - There is a question mark box → put it at the end. - Capital D on "Do".

Final: > **Do you know when the guest speaker will arrive?**

2.4 Timing: How Long to Spend Per Item (and When to Guess)

You will probably have to answer about 10 Build a Sentence items plus the email and discussion tasks inside one Writing section. ETS may change detailed timing, but to be safe, train yourself to:

- Spend no more than 45–60 seconds on each Build a Sentence item.

- Use any extra time for checking and for the email/discussion.

If you spend too long on one difficult sentence, you:

- Increase stress.

- Lose time for tasks where you can earn more points (email and discussion).

2.4.1 A Practical Time Rule

In practice sets, use this rule:

- Look at the boxes.

- Apply the 4-step strategy.

- If after 45 seconds you still do not see a clear answer:

- Choose the best order you can.

- Move on.

Remember:

- One wrong Build a Sentence item will not destroy your Writing score.

- But if you run out of time and cannot finish the email or discussion, your score will drop a lot.

2.4.2 How to Guess "Smart"

If you have to guess:

1. Make sure there is a subject and a verb near the beginning.

2. Avoid putting long time/place phrases in the middle of the subject–verb pair.

3. For questions, put the auxiliary verb (do/does/did/is/are/was/were) before the subject.

4. Use simple word order (Subject + Verb + Object + extra information).

Even a "half-guess" using these ideas is often better than a random order.

2.5 Guided Practice: Strategy Walk-Through Sets

In this section you will:

- Practice the 4-step strategy with full explanations (Set 1).

- Then try with less help (Set 2).

- Finally, work with no hints (Set 3).

- After that, you can check the answer key.

Have a notebook ready. Try to write each full sentence before looking at the answer.

2.5.1 Guided Practice Set 1 – Full Walk-Through

Work through these 4 items. After each one, read the full step-by-step explanation.

Item 1
[at the orientation] [this Friday] [will speak] [the college president]

Your task: Write the correct sentence.

Step-by-step solution

- **Step 1 – Subject and verb**

- Subject: the college president

- Verb phrase: will speak

- Start: *The college president will speak …*

- **Step 2 – Objects/Complements** - There are no objects; “speak” is complete.

- **Step 3 – Time and place**

- Place: at the orientation

- Time: this Friday

- We follow the usual pattern (place, then time): *The college president will speak at the orientation this Friday.*

- **Step 4 – Check** - Future time “this Friday” → “will speak” is good.

- Capital T, period at the end.

Final sentence:

The college president will speak at the orientation this Friday.

Item 2
[for the meeting] [prepared] [carefully] [we] [the report]
Your task: Write the correct sentence.

Step-by-step solution

- **Step 1 – Subject and verb**

- Subject: we

- Verb: prepared

- Start: *We prepared …*

- **Step 2 – Objects/Complements**

- Object: the report (What did we prepare?)

- Now: *We prepared the report …*

- **Step 3 – Extra information**

- Reason/purpose phrase: for the meeting

- Manner adverb: carefully

- We can say:

- *We prepared the report carefully for the meeting.* or

- *We carefully prepared the report for the meeting.*

- In a Build a Sentence task, both orders would normally be accepted. The most neutral: *We carefully prepared the report for the meeting.*

- **Step 4 – Check** - Tense: past simple → fine.

- Capital W, period.

Model answer:

We carefully prepared the report for the meeting.
(If you wrote "We prepared the report carefully for the meeting," that is also correct.)

Item 3
[why] [was canceled] [yesterday] [the workshop] [do you know] [?]
Your task: Write the correct sentence.

Step-by-step solution

Step 1 – Subject and main verb

- Outer question:

- Subject: you

- Verb: do know → "Do you know…?"

- Inner clause:

- Subject: the workshop

- Verb: was canceled

Step 2 – Build clauses

- Outer: Do you know…?

- Inner: why the workshop was canceled yesterday.

- Note: In the inner clause, use statement word order: *the workshop was canceled*, not "was the workshop canceled".

Step 3 – Put together

- *Do you know why the workshop was canceled yesterday?*

Step 4 – Check

- Question mark at the end.

- Capital D.

Final sentence:

Do you know why the workshop was canceled yesterday?

Item 4
[who] [won] [the scholarship] [very hardworking] [student] [the] [is]

Your task: Write the correct sentence.

Step-by-step solution

- **Step 1 – Subject and main verb**

- Main clause:

- Subject: the student

- Verb: is

- So: *The student is …*

- **Step 2 – Relative clause**

- Phrase “who won the scholarship” describes the student. It must come right after “the student”.

- So: *The student who won the scholarship is …*

- **Step 3 – Complement**

- Complement: very hardworking (adjective phrase describing the student)

- Complete sentence: *The student who won the scholarship is very hardworking.*

- **Step 4 – Check**

- Relative pronoun “who” used correctly for a person.

- Capital T, period.

Final:

The student who won the scholarship is very hardworking.

2.5.2 Guided Practice Set 2 – Partial Guidance

Now try the next 5 items. After each item, you will see:

- Step 1 and 2 done for you,

- You complete Step 3 and 4 yourself,

- Then you can check the final answer in the key at the end of the chapter.

Try to write your sentence before reading the help.

Item 5

[next semester] [I] [take] [am going to] [three science courses]

Guidance:

- Step 1: Subject = I, Verb phrase = am going to take

- Step 2: Object = three science courses

- Step 3 & 4: You decide where to put next semester, then check tense and punctuation.

Item 6

[in the library] [most students] [are] [during exams] [very stressed]

Guidance:

- Step 1: Subject = most students, Verb = are

- Step 2: Complement = very stressed

- Step 3 & 4: Place and time phrases (in the library, during exams) must be positioned naturally.

Item 7

[did you] [why] [change] [your major] [decide to] [?]

Guidance:

- Step 1: Subject = you, Verb = did decide → form “Did you decide…?”

- Step 2: Object = to change your major

- Step 3 & 4: Add “why” in the correct position and check question form.

Item 8

[my host family] [with] [staying] [for six months] [I am]

Guidance:

- Step 1: Subject = I, Verb = am staying → “I am staying…”

- Step 2: Prepositional phrase = with my host family

- Step 3 & 4: Time phrase = for six months; choose natural order and check punctuation.

Item 9

[the deadline] [extended] [our professor] [because] [several students were sick]
Guidance:

- Step 1: Subject = our professor, Verb = extended

- Step 2: Object = the deadline

- Step 3 & 4: Add reason clause starting with *because several students were sick*. Check order and punctuation.

2.5.3 Practice Set 3 – No Guidance

Now you will try 8 items without step-by-step hints. This is closer to the real test.

Try to use the 4-step strategy silently in your head. After you finish all 8, check the answer key.

Item 10

[was] [the lecture] [so boring] [that] [several students] [fell asleep]

Item 11

[your presentation] [prepare] [should] [you] [carefully]

Item 12

[when] [started] [the course] [officially] [last week]

Item 13

[is located] [the student health center] [behind] [the main parking lot]

Item 14

[who] [runs] [the international office] [very friendly] [is] [the woman]

Item 15

[if] [any questions] [you have] [during the exam] [raise] [your hand]

Item 16

[by] [have] [all assignments] [submitted] [you] [Friday] [must]

Item 17

[online] [this survey] [complete] [please] [at the end of the course]

You will find all model answers and brief explanations in the Answer Key at the end of this chapter (Section 2.6).

2.6 Review Quiz

This short quiz checks:

- Your understanding of the 4-step strategy.

- Your ability to unscramble a few sentences accurately.

Do not use the answer key until you finish all questions.

Part A – Strategy Check (Circle one answer)

1. When you see a Build a Sentence item, what is the first thing you should do?
(A) Look for the time and place expressions.
(B) Find the subject and main verb.
(C) Count how many words are in the boxes.
(D) Move the boxes randomly until it "sounds okay".

2. In a yes/no question like "Do you like this course?", which order is correct?
(A) Subject + do/does + verb
(B) Verb + subject + do/does
(C) Do/does + subject + verb
(D) Subject + verb + do/does

3. In a relative clause, the clause should come:
(A) Before the noun it describes.
(B) Immediately after the noun it describes.
(C) At the end of the sentence.
(D) At the beginning or the end; it doesn't matter.

4. If you feel stuck on one item for more than about 45 seconds, the best action is to:
(A) Keep trying until you are 100% sure, even if it takes 3 minutes.
(B) Skip the item and never answer it.
(C) Make your best guess using basic word-order rules and move on.
(D) Close your eyes and click randomly.

Part B – Build a Sentence (5 Items)

Unscramble the words/phrases to form a complete sentence. Use the 4-step strategy. Write each full sentence.

5. [the results] [tomorrow] [will] [the professor] [announce]
6. [because of the traffic] [late] [I] [to the interview] [arrived]
7. [do you know] [how far] [is] [it] [to the nearest bus stop] [?]
8. [last semester] [took] [my roommate] [an economics class] [interesting] [very]
9. [the reason] [many students] [is that] [part-time jobs] [have] [they]

(There is not always only one possible correct sentence, but there is one best natural version for each. Check the key.)

Summary of Chapter 2

In this chapter you learned:

- What the Build a Sentence task looks like on the screen.

- How it is likely scored and which errors are most common.

- A clear 4-step strategy:

1. Find the subject and main verb.

2. Add objects and complements.

3. Place time, place, and extra information.

4. Check tense, agreement, and punctuation.

- How to manage timing: aim for 45–60 seconds per item, guess smart, and move on.

- How to apply the strategy to guided and independent practice items.

In the next chapters, we will go deeper into the key grammar that makes this task easier:

- Chapter 3: Identifying the Main Clause

- Chapter 4: Placing Adjectives and Adverbs

- Chapter 5: Relative Clauses

- Chapter 6: Prepositional Phrases

- Chapter 7: Questions and Inversions

Before moving on, review any items you got wrong in this chapter. Ask yourself:

Did I correctly find the subject and verb first?

Did I confuse the order of time/place/reason?

Did I make a question with the right word order?

Chapter 11 – Email Structure: Greeting, Body, Closing

In Chapter 10, you learned how to read the prompt:

- find the purpose (why you are writing),
- identify the audience (who you are writing to),
- note the bullet points (what you must include).

In this chapter, you will learn a simple structure template for writing a clear, well-organized email in 7 minutes.

You should be able to look at a prompt and think:
"I know exactly what my first sentence will be, and I know how many sentences I need for each bullet point."

11.1 Basic Email Layout (Subject, Greeting, Paragraphs, Closing)

First, let's look at what a complete email looks like in the TOEFL task.
On the screen, you usually see:

- To: (given)
- Subject: (given)
- A prompt with the situation and bullet points
- A large typing box where you write the body of the email

You do not need to type the "To:" or "Subject:" lines. You only need:

1. Greeting
2. Opening sentence (reason for writing)
3. Body sentences (to cover all bullets)
4. Closing sentence
5. Sign-off + your name

11.1.1 A Reliable Template

You can use this basic layout for almost any TOEFL email:

Dear [Title + Name / Department],

1–2 sentences: reason for writing (connect to the situation in the prompt).

2–4 sentences: cover bullet point 1.
(Sometimes 1–2 sentences is enough.)

2–4 sentences: cover bullet point 2 (and 3 if similar).

1 sentence: polite closing / request for reply.

Sign-off,
Your Full Name

You do not have to start a new line for every bullet in the exam interface (paragraph breaks are not always visible), but you should think in paragraphs in your mind.

11.1.2 Example Skeleton (No Content Yet)

Dear [Recipient],

I am writing to … (state reason).

First, … (cover bullet 1).
In addition, … (extra sentence, if needed).

Second, … (cover bullet 2).
Finally, … (cover bullet 3, if there is one).

Thank you for your help, and I look forward to your reply.

Best regards,
[Your Name]

In the rest of this chapter, you will learn exact phrases to fill each part.

11.2 Opening Sentence: Reason for Writing (Simple Patterns)

The opening sentence is very important because:

- It tells the reader why you are writing,
- It shows the scorer that you understood the prompt,
- It gives your email a clear focus from the beginning.

You do not need to be creative. Use simple patterns.

11.2.1 Core Patterns

Use one of these safe, neutral patterns:

1. **I am writing to [verb phrase]…**
   - *I am writing to ask about the evening English course advertised on your website.*
   - *I am writing to report a problem with my recent textbook order.*
   - *I am writing to apply for the volunteer position at the cultural festival.*
2. **I am writing regarding [noun phrase]…**
   - *I am writing regarding my registration for the weekend workshop.*
   - *I am writing regarding the library fine I received yesterday.*
3. **I am writing because [clause]…**
   - *I am writing because I have a question about accommodation for the summer course.*
   - *I am writing because I would like to join the language exchange program.*

Choose the pattern that feels easiest for you and practise it.

11.2.2 Connect to the Prompt

In your opening sentence, try to repeat key words from the prompt:

- **Prompt:** “You saw an advertisement for an evening English course…”
  Opening: “I am writing to ask about the evening English course that I saw advertised on your website.”

- **Prompt:** “You received a damaged product…”
  Opening: “I am writing to report a problem with a recent product I ordered from your online store.”

This shows the examiner:

- You understood the situation clearly.
- Your email is on-topic.

11.2.3 Practice: Choose or Complete an Opening

Write an opening sentence for each situation, using “I am writing to…”, “I am writing regarding…”, or “I am writing because…”.

1. Situation: You want to volunteer at a university cultural festival.
- *Answer (model):* → I am writing to express my interest in volunteering at the university cultural festival next month.

2. Situation: You cannot attend a workshop and want to change or cancel your registration.
→ I am writing regarding my registration for the weekend workshop at your community center.

3. Situation: You want more information about an international job fair on campus.
→ I am writing to ask for more information about the international job fair that will be held at our university.

4. Situation: You want to question a library fine.
→ I am writing because I recently received a library fine and I would like to ask about it.

Keep these patterns in your “toolbox” and re-use them in the exam.

11.3 Body Paragraphs: Following the Prompt Bullets in Order

After the opening sentence, the body of your email must:

- cover each bullet point,
- in a way that is easy to see and understand.

11.3.1 One Bullet → 1–3 Sentences

A good rule:

- 1–3 sentences for each bullet point.

You can think:

- Bullet 1 → 1–3 sentences.
- Bullet 2 → 1–3 sentences.
- Bullet 3 → 1–2 sentences.

Total body length: about 5–8 sentences.

11.3.2 Follow the Bullet Order

On TOEFL, it is safer to follow the same order as the bullets in the prompt:

- Bullet 1: describe your interest
- Bullet 2: ask questions
- Bullet 3: explain why you want…

Your email body could be:

1. Sentence(s) for Bullet 1
2. Sentence(s) for Bullet 2
3. Sentence(s) for Bullet 3

This helps the rater check:

- "Yes, they answered bullet 1… bullet 2… bullet 3…"

11.3.3 Example: Mapping Bullets to Sentences

Take this prompt (paraphrased from Chapter 10):

> You want to join an evening English course.
> In your email,

- say which course you are interested in and where you saw the advertisement,
- ask two or three questions about the course (schedule, price, level, etc.),
- explain briefly why you want to take this course.

Possible mapping:

Bullet 1 (course + where you saw it):
Sentence 2: I am interested in the Intermediate Conversation course that I saw advertised on the city community website.

Bullet 2 (ask 2–3 questions):
Sentence 3: Could you please tell me on which days and at what time the class meets?
Sentence 4: I would also like to know the total price for one term and how many students are usually in each class.

Bullet 3 (explain why):
Sentence 5: I work full-time, but I need to improve my speaking skills because I plan to apply for a master's program abroad next year.

You can introduce these with small linking words:

- *First, / In addition, / Also, / Finally, / For this reason,* etc.

11.3.4 Useful Linking Phrases for Body Sentences

To connect ideas:

- **For first point:**
  - *First, … / To begin with, … / Regarding …, …*

- **For later points:**
  - *In addition, … / Also, … / Furthermore, …*
- **For reasons:**
  - *Because…, / This is because… / For this reason, …*
- **For asking questions:**
  - *Could you please tell me…?*
  - *I would like to know…*
  - *I am wondering whether…*

You do not need many connectors, but using a few helps your email feel organized.

11.3.5 Mini Practice: Bullet-to-Sentence Planning

Prompt (short):

Write an email to the housing office. In your email,

- describe one or two problems with your room,
- say what you have done to try to solve them,
- ask what the housing office can do.

Plan 1 simple sentence for each bullet:

- **Bullet 1:** There is a broken heater in my room, and the window does not close properly, so it is very cold at night.
- **Bullet 2:** I have already spoken to my resident assistant twice, but the problems have not been fixed.
- **Bullet 3:** Could you please tell me what the housing office can do to repair these issues or possibly move me to another room?

Later chapters will help you expand these into full paragraphs, but for now focus on covering each bullet clearly.

11.4 Closing and Sign Off (Polite Endings)

The end of your email should:

- signal that you are finished,
- show politeness,
- sometimes repeat the request in a short way.

11.4.1 Closing Sentences

Common and safe options:

- ***Thank you very much for your help.***
- ***Thank you for your time and attention.***
- ***I look forward to your reply.***
- ***I would really appreciate any help you can provide.***
- ***I look forward to hearing from you.***

You can combine two in one:

- ***Thank you for your help, and I look forward to your reply.***

or write them as two sentences:

- ***Thank you very much for your help. I look forward to your reply.***

11.4.2 Sign-Off (Goodbyes)

After the closing sentence(s), add a polite sign-off and your name:

- ***Best regards,***
- ***Sincerely,***
- ***Kind regards,***

Then your name:

- **Best regards,**
  [Your Name]

On TOEFL, you can use your real first name or just write Your Name if you prefer. The exact name does not affect your score, but be consistent.

11.4.3 Example Closing

Thank you very much for your help, and I look forward to your reply.

Best regards,
Maria Santos

This is enough. Do not end with something too informal like: "Bye!", "Thanks!", "See ya!", "Cheers" – these are too casual for exam emails.

11.5 Model Emails with Structural Annotations

Now let's look at two full model emails. We will label each part so you can see how the structure works.

11.5.1 Model Email 1 – Magazine Submission Problem

Prompt (short):
You submitted two short stories to a new online magazine, but you are not sure if the editor received them because there was a website problem.
In your email,

- say what you like about the new magazine,
- explain the problem you experienced,
- ask whether your submissions were received and what you should do next.

To: editor@modernstoriesmag.com
Subject: Question about story submissions

Model Answer with Annotations

[Greeting]
Dear Editor,

[Opening sentence – reason for writing]
I am writing to ask about the status of two short stories that I recently submitted to your new online magazine.

[Body – Bullet 1: what you like about the magazine]
First, I want to say that I really enjoy your magazine. I particularly like the way you publish short, diverse stories from new writers, and the website design is modern and easy to read.

[Body – Bullet 2: explain the problem]
However, when I tried to upload my two stories last week, I had a problem with the submission form. After I clicked “Submit,” I received an error message, and I did not get any confirmation email. Because of this, I am not sure whether my stories were sent correctly.

[Body – Bullet 3: ask if they were received and what to do]
Could you please let me know if you received my submissions? If not, I would be happy to resend the stories by email or use another method that you prefer.

[Closing sentence]
Thank you very much for your time and help. I look forward to your reply.

[Sign-off]
Best regards,
[Your Name]

Notice:

- The email directly follows the three bullets.
- Tone is polite and neutral.
- Each paragraph has a clear role: reason, praise for magazine, problem, request.

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